

Green and pleasant

EMILY TOBIN profiles three artists who capture the private beauty of gardens and plants

Gardens and art: the relationship between the two is long and symbiotic. Cast a cursory glance round any of our national museums and you are bound to land upon a sweeping horticultural scene or a study of a plant or flower. Monet, Caillebotte, Matisse, Liebermann and Nolde not only found boundless inspiration in their gardens but were keen plantsmen, too. Gardens provide a private world of beauty and remoteness from reality that makes them the perfect sequestered sphere for artists to experiment with light, colour and form, as these three artists have found.

BUYING ART

▲ CARLOS MORAGO

In the typical spirit of Romanticism, Carlos Morago excludes any human presence from his work. Instead, he is concerned with what he describes as 'the quiet beauty of everyday life' - be it a simple pot or climbing ivy. 'I try to imbue my paintings with intimacy, to organise chaos by replacing it with the endurance and structure of emotion.' Painting delicately in acrylic or oil, Carlos depicts gardens and plants in soft focus, giving his subjects a dreamlike quality. Contributing to this is his subdued palette of blues, greens and whites. 'My inspirations are innumerable and my evolution has taken me from the Romanesque and primitive painters to contemporary art,' he says. But it is fellow Spaniard, Velázquez, whose work he returns to most often. *Prices start at £800; lucybcampbell.com*



▲ OLWYN BOWEY

'I originally fancied myself as a botanist,' says Olwyn Bowey, but painting prevailed and she 'became a professional layabout'. She lives in Sussex, a county that seduced her with 'all its Constable-y things. The king-cups, sluice gates and mill at Coultershaw'. When she's not camping out on other people's land, Olwyn can be found closeted in her greenhouse. 'I think I am more than a little like Alan Bennett's *The Lady in the Van* - a nuisance to various landowners, who I must admit have been remarkably tolerant.' Despite her qualms, I doubt these landowners are anything but delighted to have Olwyn paint their property in her distinctively intimate style. 'I tend to treat plants as characters and paint them as I would a portrait,' she says. This is unsurprising as she began her career with portraiture - sitters became harder to find once she moved to the country and her work became increasingly concerned with plant life. Hostas, Chinese lanterns, sunflowers and geraniums have all been rendered with meticulous attention to detail and burst with colour and life. *Prices start at around £4,000; mallgalleries.com* □



▲ JOHN PEARCE

'It has often been said that in art you don't choose a subject: it chooses you,' says John Pearce. 'Most humans have a love of nature and I am no exception.' But John is not concerned with cultivated blooms and neatly pruned hedges: his interest lies with grasses, foliage, nettles and brambles. He cites this pre-occupation as partly influenced by growing up in London after the war, when he would play at the edges of his father's allotment or 'on bombsites, which nature had regenerated with reassuring biodiversity'. John works entirely from direct observation and, having decided on the location, he will start by painting the furthest elements, working towards the foreground. 'This traces a journey through time and space, so the subtle signs of seasonal change coexist on the canvas.' *Prices start at £2,000; johnpearcepainter.com*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Carlos Morago, *Two Bonsais*, oil on panel, 60 x 100cm. Olwyn Bowey, *The Kaffir Lily*, oil on canvas, 103 x 87cm. John Pearce, *Herbe Folle*, *Les Bouillons*, oil on canvas, 122 x 152cm